

# André Prudhommeaux, Algeria and National Liberation

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper David Porter discusses the meaning of ‘colonial anarchism’ by studying the work, life and times of André Prudhommeaux. It explores Prudhommeaux’s principled opposition to colonial domination and his refusal to support political nationalism. The paper scrutinises Prudhommeaux’s response to the Algerian war and explains his conflation of militant anti-colonial struggle with revolutionary violence and terrorism. While noting the internal consistency of Prudhommeaux’s stance, the paper argues that it attests to a major shift in his thinking between the 1930s and 1950s and a problematic assessment of Cold War politics. After outlining and contextualising Prudhommeaux’s colonial anarchism, the paper considers how critics responded to his position and assesses the implications for contemporary anarchist politics.

**Keywords:** ‘colonial anarchism’, André Prudhommeaux, Algeria, anti-colonial struggle, liberation, revolution

To examine the possible meaning of ‘colonial anarchism’, I chose to study the explicit words, broader intellectual context and militant roots of a controversial prominent figure in the 1930s-1960s French anarchist movement. Though André Prudhommeaux<sup>1</sup> was known in the 1930s as an uncompromising left revolutionary, critical of Spanish anarchist leaders’ ‘treason’, several critics within the movement in later years cited statements by him to exemplify the failure and apparent indifference of most French anarchists to address seriously and responsibly the anti-colonial freedom struggle of the Algerian people. In 1947, one observed, Prudhommeaux asserted that anarchists had no interest in nationalist causes, while in 1959, said another, Prudhommeaux predicted regression for North African

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society with the advent of independence.<sup>2</sup> The immediate question thus posed about Prudhommeaux is how an anarchist with such a strong revolutionary reputation in earlier years could react so coldly to an important revolutionary movement in the postwar colonial world.

On the surface, these critical and dismissive comments by Prudhommeaux seem grossly insensitive to the Algerian struggle, thus contradicting the anarchist ideal of universal freedom. This was especially shocking when concerning a people subjected for many decades, as Prudhommeaux was well aware, to a colonial regime of foreign invasion, murderous repression, land theft on a gigantic scale and fundamentally discriminatory political and economic structures – all glued together by an arbitrary and self-serving racist definition of ‘civilization’. Most observers today would view Algerians’ attempt several decades ago to free themselves from foreign oppression as obviously justified, as did indeed at the time many anarchists and others in the French left. However, the means chosen for liberation and the meaning itself of ‘freedom’ for the colonised were for Prudhommeaux crucial issues of dispute.

Principled anarchist opposition to statism, capitalism, militarism, racism and fascism logically implied condemning colonialism. Thus, in the very month the Algerian revolution broke out in 1954, Prudhommeaux apparently agreed: ‘As for the push of the oppressed for an end to military and colonial oppression’, he said, ‘it goes without saying that we [anarchists] could not possibly be indifferent to them’.<sup>3</sup> Investigating his failure, however, to translate from this level of broad critique into support for militant action by a strong grassroots anti-colonial movement provides important insight into the apparent phenomenon of ‘colonial anarchism’.<sup>4</sup>

André Prudhommeaux was a veteran French anarchist since the early 1930s with years of militant writing and publishing. He vigorously defended in 1933 the Dutch arsonist of the German Reichstag, Marinus van der Libbe, despite his abandonment and condemnation by many anarchists and most leftists as a tool of the Nazis. Before and throughout the events in Spain, Prudhommeaux collaborated closely with exiled Russian anarchist Voline<sup>5</sup> in editing the French anarchist journal, *Terre Libre*<sup>6</sup> and he was a key figure in the FAF (French Language Anarchist Federation) from 1936 to 1939. In the latter year, Prudhommeaux escaped to Switzerland as France mobilised for World War II. Upon his return in late 1946, he became quite active in the FA (Anarchist Federation) and the next year edited its newspaper, *Le Libertaire*. He was a prolific writer until his death two decades later.

Prudhommeaux was a principled thinker and advocate and had a legendary reputation for ‘intransigent’ positions.<sup>7</sup> He could not justifiably be accused of inex-

perience, opportunism, lack of courage or superficial understandings of anarchism. He has been called 'one of the sharpest minds' in the French movement, 'the most talented anarchist of his time' and 'one of the most penetrating anarchists of his century'.<sup>8</sup> But it is striking that in the recent special issue of a French anarchist journal devoted solely to Prudhommeaux neither of the two extensive biographical essays discussed his stands concerning the future of French colonies and the wrenching Algerian war.<sup>9</sup>

After presenting Prudhommeaux's core substantive statements from 1947 through 1962 and their broader roots, I will critique his position from perspectives of Algerians and French anarchists, and suggest how his stance falls within broader categories of generic anarchist debates.

## PRUDHOMMEAUX'S POSITION ON ALGERIA

An article by Prudhommeaux in 1947 observed that anti-colonialism is important for those in the metropole as well as in the colonies since preserving the empire is economically impoverishing and encourages a larger repressive force within France itself and a greater chance for conscription of Frenchmen for new wars.<sup>10</sup> 'For having kept the pretensions of imperial grandeur, we will be reduced to the level presently of black mercenaries in the French army. Such is the logic of history: *For a people who oppress others cannot be free*' (emphasis in original). Thus, 'the peoples of the Empire must cease to be colonies. Otherwise, for ourselves, we will be reduced to the condition that we would propose to impose on them'.<sup>11</sup>

Though without specific reference to Algeria, sooner or later, he said, the colonised will successfully revolt. 'Resistance to oppression is an enduring right of man. Only from this generalised resistance, renewed as many times as necessary, can surge forth a humanity worthy of conquering and maintaining its freedom'. The question then, he said, is 'whether the "child people" will know how to be free'. It is only through their own experience that they will learn to gain the consciousness and take the appropriate action to throw off new exploitative masters from their own people or from powerful neighbours or American or Russian imperialists ambitiously waiting in the wings. Not that it is right to expect of them a 'sudden clear and total anarchist consciousness'. But it is only through 'the apprenticeship' of their ongoing struggles against oppressors 'that children become men'. By a joint anti-colonial struggle with those in the colonies, he said, we Frenchmen would gain our own freedom 'and we will try to keep it. Native peoples will have conquered their own ... Will they keep it? That is their affair'.<sup>12</sup>

In an article one month after the November 1, 1954 outbreak of the

Algerian insurrection, Prudhommeaux now moved from his earlier abstract ‘anti-colonialism’ to focus on the particular liberation struggle close to home. Here Prudhommeaux denounced the simplistic and dangerous xenophobic concept of ‘nationality’ itself, with its ‘fanatic’ racial and religious identities, and implying the ‘collective guilt’ and exclusions of others. Who is the true Algerian, he asked, just like who is the true Frenchman? Are descendents of Arabs who conquered the area by sword and the Qur’an to be included or only descendents of the original Berbers? Are European workers in Algeria and Algerian workers in Paris to be excluded and thus victimised? After exclusions, he said, come forced displacements, violence and extermination, as in India following independence. Exclusions based on ‘nationality’ lead as well to victimising those defined as traitors and dissidents. All of this, said Prudhommeaux, proves that political ‘solutions’ for mass populations are inane. To prepare the way for a peaceful world ‘without police and borders’, we must begin with rational analysis of prejudice and ‘healthy, reassuring and free interrelations’ at the grassroots.<sup>13</sup>

A year later, he harshly criticised those who cheered each set of killings in Algeria, including the French anarchist FCL (Libertarian Communist Federation), as likely to further radicalise the population against European Algerians and force the latter to leave ‘by suitcase or coffin’. Their irresponsible incendiary politics of ‘holy war’ assumed that the purge of Europeans and political independence for Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia on the model of Egypt, Pakistan and Iraq ‘would resolve or at least clarify social problems, thus being a positive step toward grass-roots consciousness, class struggle, etc.’ None of this would happen, he predicted, as is shown by ‘the obvious backward course in the realms of culture and morals in the “Arab” countries that have gained what is commonly called national independence’. In fact, he asserted, their evolution has led to ‘religious obscurantism, the cloistering of women, the forced exploitation of peasants, corrupt and arrogant military bureaucratic regimes, the fierce autonomy of State and caste, [and] extermination or forced exile of infidels’. Alternatively, offered Prudhommeaux, ‘one surely can’t see why absolute equality of political and civil rights could not be gained by Algerians of Arab/Berber descent within the (provisional) framework of French nationality, nor how one more border – one more State, with the Qur’an as base and Arabic for official language – would be a positive step for ten million inhabitants of the Maghreb who, to the extent that they read and write, even with a completely nationalist voice, do so today in French’.<sup>14</sup>

However, a shorter essay by Prudhommeaux apparently in the mid-1950s explored conditions that might justify anarchist support for movements of national liberation. The ‘imperialism’ vs ‘nationalism’ theoretical dilemma is too abstract, he

said. Rather, one should ask at the level of principles whether the movements are ‘*a step forward*’ toward social liberation of the exploited or oppressed or to the contrary *a step backward* toward chauvinism, hatred between peoples, cultural obscurantism and linguistic isolationism?’ (emphasis in original). Perhaps more important, he said, are the means used in the struggle. Is individual or collective ‘civil resistance’ employed, as through strikes and boycotts or is there ‘recourse to racial, religious or political terrorism against ethnic minorities and individuals, as well as militarism and warfare, statism through nationalisation, and strongman leaders, thus leading to totalitarian practices and massive expansion of State powers’. While he concedes that, ‘unfortunately, it is scarcely possible that anarchists can modify by their simple intervention the essential style and practical content’ of a national liberation movement, all efforts at social transformation have ‘simultaneously some anarchism and some totalitarian traits (in quite varied proportions)’, and thus ‘the intervention of anarchists is not necessarily useless and ineffective’.<sup>15</sup>

Again in the context of the continuing war, in late 1957 or early 1958, Prudhommeaux wrote a letter to the French anarchist journal *Noir et Rouge*, re-stating his disdain for *political* nationalism – but this time as opposed to a different nationalism, as in Hungary, of grassroots identity with a particular set of customs or ethnic personality protecting itself against outside threats. This latter form of nationalism has the nature of a conservative anarchic populism while the former type, as in Algeria, has become ‘the movement of transition toward the revolutionary totalitarian state and has lost all anarchic significance and content’. He said that nationalist demands deserve support only in the populist sense, as in the Hungarian insurrection of 1956.

In Hungary, he asserted, the struggle was for economic and cultural independence and political neutrality. ‘No terrorism was needed to detach Hungarians from the occupier and to force them to rally to the insurrection. In Algeria and in metropolitan France, FLN killers use coercion and especially terror toward their own Muslim brothers’. As well, ‘Algeria is not viable [economically] if French troops withdraw. Its agriculture is ruined by abuses of every sort and it has seven million too many inhabitants who, however unjust their situation, live only through the support of metropolitan France. There is no possible dignity for a people reduced by its population growth to a sort of armed begging’.<sup>16</sup>

While Prudhommeaux thus explicitly rejected political and economic inequality *within* the colonial framework, he also rejected statist nationalism as terroristic and the Algerian FLN as totalitarian. The framework for this position can be found in broader principles he articulated during the same period concerning revolution and civil liberties.

In an essay on William Godwin four years earlier, Prudhommeaux praised the nature of English and American revolutions that did not, like the French revolution of Robespierre, St Just, Marat and Jacques Roux, devour their own ranks, but left a legacy of tolerating political difference. He rejected the notions, as found in the French model, of insurrectionary extremism, demagoguery, dictatorship by the masses or fanatics acting in their name, destructiveness and the supposedly redeeming value of revolutionary violence, a model that has come to infect, for some, he said, the very concept of anarchism. It is crucial, he thought, to distinguish between legitimate revolution as 'the act of liberation' and revolution as 'an act of oppression, at the moment when revolt transforms into tyranny'. To avoid the latter, he said, Godwin wisely advised basing just political action on 'the autonomy of human individuality, considered as the seat of all inspiration and of all reason, of all knowledge and of all will'.<sup>17</sup> This theme of 'revolutionary individualism' was the basis for Prudhommeaux's later claim that the Hungarian revolution was an insurrection of free undisciplined individuals, the best sort of model.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, he viewed the typical twentieth-century revolutions, whether giving birth to Bolshevik, national socialist, fascist, Francoist or Nasserite regimes, 'through the same orchestration of machine guns and speeches', as simply a 'reversal of roles where yesterday's victims become today's executioners and proletarians become prison guards'.<sup>19</sup>

Quite important also as a framing factor for his position on Algeria, Prudhommeaux had by the early 1950s come to accept the central Cold War dichotomy between Western liberal democracies and communist states, the latter seen as expansionist and totalitarian threats to the West. Under severe persecution, he said, anarchists (and other dissidents) could not openly exist under communist regimes. However, in the West, a degree of tolerance, though limited, through civil liberties of speech, press, assembly, association and privacy permitted anarchism to survive and to push for greater freedom still. In 1953, he wrote, 'Anarchists have an essential role to play in defending the West, a role that can't be played by anyone else ... [A] role that consists of maintaining and, if possible, enlarging, day after day, the difference between West and East, a difference that is our sole hope in this world ...' Thus, 'there is a sort of natural alliance between anarchist ultra-liberalism and liberal infra-anarchism ... Liberalism and libertarianism have the same solution: to incite individuality'.<sup>20</sup> For Prudhommeaux, this Cold War dichotomy became a central focus drawing him also, as writer and editor, to the Congress of Cultural Freedom's *Preuves* journal, with its circles of prominent anti-communist French intellectuals.<sup>21</sup>

In short, within the existing Cold War framework, Prudhommeaux viewed the Algerian anti-colonial liberation struggle in great part according to whether it

abided by or subtracted from the precious relative freedoms of the West. Already, he saw the victory of the Chinese revolution as presenting over four hundred million new people to the Soviet bloc, as well as gaining for it the sympathies of millions more throughout Asia. Along with threats posed by communists in the West itself, national independence movements with Marxist orientation and totalitarian behaviour became, in his view, *de facto* (if not explicitly so in secret) allies of the communist totalitarian bloc, thus in themselves a danger to the West as well as to their own people.<sup>22</sup>

After the Fall 1956 Suez crisis, he observed, '[T]he Soviets have succeeded in exploiting the deep bitterness of Arab countries against the "weak" and constantly declining imperialism of England and France and, more generally, to make the anti-colonial movements in Africa, Asia (and even America) their instruments at the diplomatic and military levels'. To date, the primary theatres for these offensives are 'North Africa and the Middle East'.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the implied logic of his overall anarchist principles, Prudhommeaux obviously understood the reasons for and was certainly *not* opposed generically to colonial people's freedom struggles. Despite his general 'anti-colonialism', however, his antagonism toward the FLN during the Algerian war was intense and especially derived from his uncompromising anti-centralist commitment at the constant core of his critiques of fascism, communism, others on the left and anarchist organisations themselves.

In the internal battles of the 1930s within the French anarchist movement, Prudhommeaux closely aligned with Russian anarchist exile, Voline, in opposing Bolshevik-type centralism in the anarchist Platformism model.<sup>24</sup> He (and Voline) then became openly quite critical of the CNT-FAI leadership's collaboration with totalitarian communists and other statists during the Spanish civil war. While praising the Spanish social revolution at the base, he quickly denounced this political coalition since inevitably it would sacrifice the vitality of the social revolution itself. The disastrous May 1937 events<sup>25</sup> resulting from these compromises only intensified the hostility he expressed publicly in his anarchist articles, though he himself then was criticised by many anarchists for daring to make such open attacks in the midst of the desperate anti-fascist civil war.<sup>26</sup> The demands of organisational pragmatism and unity, he believed, must not be used to sacrifice anarchist revolutionary ideals and autonomous direct action. The true anarchist sees social transformation as a liberation opportunity for himself and others that must be defended 'against all attempts to smother or monopolise it or to divert it towards any kind of regime which absorbs the capacities and denies the rights of the individual'.<sup>27</sup>

With Franco's 1939 victory in Spain and with the failure of grassroots anarchists to adequately challenge CNT-FAI leaders, Prudhommeaux despaired of any potential for an organised and non-hierarchical working-class social revolution anywhere. Concerning the approaching larger European conflict with fascism, Prudhommeaux's opposition to anarchist participation was well explained afterwards in his 1946 article strongly rejecting the pro-Allies collaborationist position of influential anarchist Rudolf Rocker. The latter, Prudhommeaux summarised, had basically called for a wartime alliance that subsumed all independent anarchist critiques and actions, including in the domestic labour struggle itself. Rocker, he said, had argued that all existing free space and the potential for its expansion would be lost if Germany won the war. Like Emma Goldman, while no doubt hoping that an insurrection within Germany itself would eliminate the Nazi regime, Prudhommeaux argued that the Allies-Axis confrontation was simply a conflict among rival imperialisms. As in the Spanish civil war, his stance was that to voluntarily suppress anarchist ideas and independent action, become docile to orders, and risk one's life on behalf of one's oppressors was abhorrent. If anarchists followed Rocker's suggestions and failed 'to protect their political virginity concerning militarism, imperialism, warring totalitarianism and the mutual murder of workers, who would protect it?' Given their relatively insignificant numbers, he said, at least anarchists have guarded their own revolutionary integrity for over 150 years against all betrayals – and thus gained 'the esteem of the people and the hatred of all governments'.<sup>28</sup>

In late 1939, Prudhommeaux himself had left France with his wife Dori for refuge in Switzerland, her country of origin. Because political activity was not possible, Prudhommeaux devoted himself to translating literature and writing poetry. It was in this period that the combination of Spain and his forced exile from political activism caused, in the words of a biographer, 'historical necessity [to be] deported to the margins of his consciousness'.<sup>29</sup> As Prudhommeaux expressed it in 1954, 'Human activity – once freed from the myth imposed by an ideal model – is a choice between infinite possibilities, just like the voyage of a submarine or that of an all-terrain vehicle or a helicopter. There is no locomotive of history with necessary tracks and direction, as long as one believes it'.<sup>30</sup> For Prudhommeaux, what now replaced 'historical necessity' in this most critical shift, but consistent with his long-time egalitarian commitment to individual integrity in revolution and direct action, was 'to maintain the essential – his interior freedom'.<sup>31</sup>

What this implied for Prudhommeaux was the need to examine everything, including his own life and the movement – critically, rationally, and with a focus separate from the realm of passing passionate and ready-made political slogans.<sup>32</sup>



Prescient of the perspective of many later anarchists of the 1970s and '80s and beyond, no longer hoping for world social revolution, he stressed the need to find revolutions in daily life through 'the effort of free culture and the specific refusal of certain actions',<sup>33</sup> opportunities that 'can surface from one moment to the next and that one should recognise in all [their] grandeur'.<sup>34</sup> 'It is by opposing the established disorder, day after day, with anarchist mediation, experimentation and education; it is in neutralising, even if only on a small scale, the evils of mechanisation and massive social alienation; it is in learning to ignore the state and to recognise men that we can perpetuate the essential principle of humanity and restore it little by little ...'<sup>35</sup> Prudhommeaux was thus now intransigent in his defence of flourishing individuality, but no longer hopeful of seeing it and no longer promoting it in the context of a large-scale organised proletarian revolutionary movement.

Especially striking in the midst of this major shift of consciousness and priority, however, was Prudhommeaux's failure simultaneously to emphasise as well the stark and traumatic lived reality for indigenous populations within the colonies. While despising the methods of French military repression in Algeria, he said nothing to support the legitimacy and importance there of an organised struggle against overall colonial oppression. While surely aware of the miserable social conditions for most, before and during the Algerian war itself, Prudhommeaux subsumed the national independence struggle to a broader Eurocentric liberal anti-communism and his provisional truce with the west more veiled centralism, comparable to Rocker's position in World War II. All sides of the French anarchist movement had to question what most to emphasise, what overarching political priorities, if any, to choose as the best realms available for advancing their anarchist agendas. But Prudhommeaux's choice (and that of Albert Camus and much of the FA) was viewed by many other anarchists and others on the French left as at least objectively supporting French colonialism, since it equally blamed oppressor and those in revolt, even if Prudhommeaux expressed his view in apparent good faith.

Prudhommeaux had not viewed victory by the Allies as a potential springboard for social revolution. However, by the mid-1950s and the advent of the Cold War, but without the super-militarised atmosphere of World War II, he decided that over the long run a liberal democratic system could indeed provide leverage for further advancing anarchist principles and ways of life. But his position thus also implied that, within the fascist realities of colonial regimes and the Cold War framework, the best chance for greater freedom for the colonised was through individual liberation.

## CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

While there was a certain internal consistency to Prudhommeaux's logic, his stance toward Algerian liberation was abstractly and over-rationalistically removed from the subjectively lived experience of colonial oppression. In his wartime statements on Algerian suffering, he seemed to be at least as personally empathetic to the plight of minority non-combatant *pieds-noirs* as to that of the vast majority – the indigenous Algerian population that was displaced, tortured and murdered in great numbers. As a result, he was less interested in and moved by, it seemed, the passionate motivation for colonial liberation that inspired millions of Algerians courageously to support the national independence struggle despite the tragic contradictions within the movement itself. As Algerian liberal humanist writer/teacher Mouloud Feraoun expressed at the time (critiquing the equivocation of his French Algerian writer friends Albert Camus and Emmanuel Roblès), those who denounced FLN attacks against civilians as unjustified should understand 'those of us who are so close to them and so different at the same time. I would like them to put themselves in our place ... Those who are in charge of French sovereignty in this country have treated me as an enemy since the beginning of these events ... [I am asked] to defend the cause of France at the expense of my own people, who may be wrong but who die and suffer under the scorn and indifference of civilised countries'.<sup>36</sup>

Prudhommeaux failed to differentiate among the plural motivations and orientations within the militant ranks and general anti-colonial population of Algerians themselves. As with grassroots anarchists of the 1930s in Spain, not everyone within or supporting the FLN approved everything done by its leaders or by over-zealous local guerrillas. A more measured, insightful perspective could have included considering Fanon's assumption that having sacrificed so much for the cause, grassroots Algerians after independence would be jealous of their power and prevent usurpation of their hoped-for social revolution.<sup>37</sup> It would have taken account of militant elements within the Algerian movement who were as committed to social transformation as to national independence.

For example, long-time Algerian anarchist Mohamed Saïl collaborated with Prudhommeaux in the 1930s to publish a North African edition of *Terre Libre*. Beyond his steady, sharp critique of French colonialism in Algeria, two of Saïl's essays in 1951 argued how anti-authoritarian, egalitarian, mutual aid and federative traditions in Algerian society (especially in Kabylia) would move that society to social revolution and anarchist self-organisation as part of political independence.<sup>38</sup>

Prudhommeaux's perspective could have also acknowledged, as he observed in

one of his autobiographical essays, that through experience people can evolve to an anarchist perspective over time.<sup>39</sup> Doing so could reasonably have suggested (as it did for some French anarchists) at least the possibility of a multi-staged liberation process that, in effect, Prudhommeaux himself appeared to accept (over the long term) in the West generally. By that view, political independence from the coloniser provides greater potential leverage for economic, social, and economic freedom.

Additionally, for Prudhommeaux somehow to differentiate FLN atrocities from those of the 'non-totalitarian' Western Allies in their coolly planned civilian massacres of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Dresden, and Tokyo, let alone in the colonies themselves, seemed quite unbalanced. Because of his particular priorities, Prudhommeaux could reasonably seem now to be objectively 'collaborating' with liberal democratic regimes, as opposed to his zealous anti-collaborationist position in Spain and World War II. Within this constraint, Prudhommeaux offered no satisfactory or viable solution for colonised peoples' liberation apart from very individualist approaches, themselves restrained by the fascist controls inherent in the colonial system.

Beyond this, some of Prudhommeaux's comments could easily be viewed as condescendingly insulting in apparently 'blaming the victim', the Algerian people, for much of their own plight. Though noting apparent poverty of Algerian soils, Prudhommeaux failed to acknowledge that this condition owed much to French land expropriation and the forced retreat of Algerians into less suitable soils. His view of substantial Algerian 'overpopulation' didn't account for the fact that this was typical among poorer societies, including the West itself in the early days of capitalism, as a general strategy for surviving poverty conditions. Meanwhile, the poverty itself in Algeria, which Prudhommeaux viewed as making independence meaningless, owed much to the forcible and racist nature of the French colonial system, while the relative prosperity of certain sectors in France owed much to continual exploitation of the colonies. Even Prudhommeaux's critique of Algerian exclusivism against *pieds-noirs*, however valid his opposition to terrorism toward civilians, seemed to blame Algerians for a quite understandable reaction to the racism and/or violence persistently expressed for decades by the great majority of *pieds-noirs* themselves.

A number of Prudhommeaux's other observations were paternalistic at the least. Rejecting any progressive cultural role of Algerian Islam is not a surprising anarchist view, given the general rejection of at least institutional religion. However, statements that Algerian independence would be a retreat in culture and morals, that literate and militant Algerians use only or depend on French,<sup>40</sup> or that Algeria, compared with Hungary, has no authentic populist culture of its own are surprising

and quite striking. Additionally, with reference to the Algerian liberation movement itself, Prudhommeaux's remarks could easily be understood to imply that the FLN was simply a manipulated tool of Soviet Communism without autonomous decision-making of its own. Already criticised above were Prudhommeaux's remarks implying that all FLN militants were terrorists, that the organisation was monolithic rather than composed of various tendencies, including some critical of a potential future authoritarian regime. Indeed, this contradicted, in general terms, Prudhommeaux's own belief that 'in every milieu and under all political, religious and other masks, one can find a host of anarchists without labels or cards', and it is by actions and openness to ideas rather than by ideological labels that one should choose one's comrades.<sup>41</sup> Impossible to overlook also was Prudhommeaux's 1947 essay on colonial liberation in which he implied that native populations were still at a childlike stage and might not be capable, compared to the French, of protecting their own freedom once the empire was dismantled.

Prudhommeaux's prediction of an authoritarian future regime for independent Algeria has of course been borne out over time. On the other hand, his blanket assumption during the 1950s left no room for the potential of the first phase of revolution, the anarchic liberatory impulse, to lead to something else, at least on the part of grassroots anti-authoritarian elements in the movement, as many anarchists and Fanon had hoped. This contrasted with Prudhommeaux's admission elsewhere of a potential base in that phase for anarchist influence.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, that very potential for a large-scale anarchic liberatory impulse did manifest itself at various periods of Algeria's post-independence history – most impressively in the more-or-less spontaneous wave of workers' self-management efforts in the first year, in the Berber Spring of 1980, in the spread of major urban revolts in the 1980s, in the Kabyle insurrection and anarchic self-organisation of 2001 and in subsequent 'Arab Spring'-type local revolts throughout the country to the present.

Though a long-time French anarchist recently told me that it would be 'imbecilic' to accuse Prudhommeaux of racism, and despite Prudhommeaux's anarchist principles that opposed such a stance, the various above statements could easily be construed by others as 'racist language' if that is defined to *include* descriptions of a certain racial or ethnic group that denies, intentionally or not, its right or ability to live an existence of equal worth to one's own. At the least, the collection of Prudhommeaux's statements and assumptions above, in the context of two decades of self-sacrificing Algerian struggle for national liberation during the 1940s and 1950s, could be reasonably described as objectively colonialist (or perhaps latently 'xenophobic', as one French anarchist suggested recently<sup>43</sup>) since

they continued to suggest French superiority, Algerian inferiority and no apparent potential for determined Algerians to gain a level of freedom at least equal to that of the French.<sup>44</sup>

Beyond the question of anarchist priorities raised here in analysing Prudhommeaux's position, anarchist perspectives on appropriate stances toward colonialism, toward national liberation movements and toward anti-fascism struggles are a sub-set of the broader spectrum of 'idealist' (or sceptic) versus 'social activist' (or optimist) orientations<sup>45</sup> and the closely related issue of collaboration or not with non-anarchist forces, especially to assist a potential 'multi-staged' process of liberation. In every context, these are fundamental strategic issues dividing the historical and contemporary anarchist movements throughout the world, often debated in terms of the potentials or not of 'revolutionary reforms'.

For many decades now, most anarchists have accepted the death of the earlier anarchist dream of a *grand soir* revolution quickly transforming society into a non-hierarchical paradise. Even those like Prudhommeaux, however, who rejected the potential of Algerian anti-colonial liberation to provide a springboard for fuller social revolution, concluded that Western liberal democracy, whatever its limitations and contradictions, provided some leverage for further liberation. This itself is a set of long-range 'liberation stages' vision and strategy. More common now is the concept that 'anarchist revolution' is inevitably a series of liberations – perhaps no more than cyclical or generational – but not inevitably a march continuously forward as envisaged in earlier days of the movement. As *Noir et Rouge* recognised, anarchists need to recognise as well the importance of anarchic emancipatory impulses and determination in *non-anarchist* human struggles against arbitrary authority as long as their intent is not to oppress others in turn. The more recent Arab Spring contexts across North Africa and the Middle East are good examples. For larger-scale events, as Prudhommeaux suggested, anarchists must choose appropriate responses in public commentary and/or various forms of direct supportive action. Careful analysis instead of broad formulaic responses, he thought, should be brought to each such context. What he failed to acknowledge concerning Algeria was that every social change movement contains diverse tendencies, some more committed to broad liberatory transformation than others.

'National independence' agendas are presently discussed in situations as diverse as Scotland, Catalonia, Chechnya, Kurdistan, Quebec, Flanders, New Caledonia, Native North America, Hawaii and Palestine. Many anarchists will continue to insist that such 'national liberations' inevitably imply a state and thus that any support should be avoided. Probably most at present would not choose

such a blanket approach, perhaps partly because with the grassroots passion connected to national identity, some may believe that mobilising for large-scale social change may seem easier to organise on national rather than sub- or international scales. The above named examples of 'national liberation' contexts are all different and the particular movements involved have assuredly quite different weights of more or less non-hierarchical tendencies. If support is to be given, anarchist logic would suggest the need to discern those tendencies and individuals, if any, that are more open or potentially open to anarchist means and ideals, including the potential for *non-statist forms of national independence* based significantly, perhaps, on long-standing anarchic traditions within the societies concerned.

A related broad issue, suggested as well by Prudhommeaux, is whether some anarchists' concern with the *size* of social change movements is so prioritised that they compromise the *quality* of change to be accomplished. Again, considering the above list of 'anti-colonial' contexts helps to clarify the issue. Referring to the Algerian struggle of the 1950s and '60s, there was a critical distinction between French anarchists concerning themselves with Algerians' liberation simply at personal levels or with Algerian national liberation generally (including FLN rivals or only certain factions within the FLN) or with national liberation as accomplished only through FLN leadership. Prudhommeaux, of course, would argue that not choosing to support the dominant national liberation movement in a specific colonial context does not make one 'objectively colonial', especially if, based on general anarchist principles, one simultaneously denounces military repression and the various political, economic, social and cultural oppressions involved. For Prudhommeaux, it seems, an overall strong articulation of stubborn anarchist principles, in itself, could have been an indirect, though limited, long-range valuable form of generalised 'anti-colonialism'. In this sense, Prudhommeaux's concern with protecting the 'political virginity' of anarchism instead of potentially diluting its message with *de facto* common fronts had some logic, though his Eurocentrism and individualist emphasis, tinged with language paternalistic at the least, no doubt subtracted greatly from its positive potential in the case of Algeria.

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France. He completed graduate studies in politics at Columbia under the supervision of Immanuel Wallerstein. His 1983 book *Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution* was republished in 2006 and has been translated into Greek, French, Spanish, and German. Other books include *Megamall on the Hudson: Walmart, Planning, and Grassroots Resistance* (with Chester L. Mirsky 2003) and *Eyes to the South: French Anarchists and Algeria* (2011), and his translation of Kadour Naïmi's *Freedom in Solidarity: My Experiences in the May 1968 Uprising* (AK Press 2019). He died in December 2018, aged 79.

## NOTES

1. André Prudhommeaux (1902-1968) also occasionally used the pseudonyms of André Prunier and Jean Cello.
2. Max Grand-Père 'Anarchisme et tiers monde à travers l'histoire', *Informations et Réflexions Libertaires*, 51 (1984); A. Courson, 'L'insurrection algérienne et les communistes libertaires, part two', *Lutter*, 11 (1985), respectively.
3. André Prunier (Prudhommeaux), 'The Libertarians and Politics', *Contre-Courant*, 55 (1954), translated in R. Graham (ed.) *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, vol. II – *The Emergence of the New Anarchism (1939-1977)*, (Montreal, Black Rose Books, 2007), p170.
4. Or what might even be called 'anti-colonial colonial anarchism'.
5. Voline (V.N. Eichenbaum) (1882-1945) was a Russian anarchist best known for his participation as an influential intellectual in the anarchist Makhnovist revolution of Ukraine, 1918-21, and in subsequent exile as a tireless publicist of the plight of Russian political prisoners and historian of the Makhnovist experience.
6. *Terre Libre* was published in Nîmes and Paris between May 1934 and June/July 1939.
7. 'En guise de présentation'; and F. Gomez, 'Eléments de biographie intellectuelle et politique', both in *A Contretemps: Bulletin de Critique Bibliographique*, 42 (2012). All issues of this on-line journal are available at: <www.acontretemps.org>.
8. Respectively, M. Laisant, 'Ceux qui nous quittent: André Prudhommeaux', *Le Monde Libertaire*, 146 (1968); 'En guise de présentation'; F. Gomez, 'Le doute méthodologique et l'art d'écrire', *A Contretemps*, 42 (2012).
9. Prudhommeaux was the subject of a whole issue of the French anarchist *A Contretemps* journal in February 2012, including valuable biographical sketches by Freddy Gomez and Charles Jacquier.
10. Prudhommeaux's argument here seems quite reasonable given the Spanish and French militaries' use of the colonies as launching pads for overthrowing elected homeland regimes in 1936 and 1958 respectively.

11. André Prunier, 'Evacuer les colonies ... et après?' *Le Libertaire*, 78 (1947).
12. Ibid.
13. André Prunier, 'Chacun chez soi?' *Le Monde Libertaire*, 3 (1954).
14. André Prunier, 'Le pétrole sur le feu', *Le Monde Libertaire*, 12 (1955).
15. A.P. (Prudhommeaux), (no date), 'Les anarchistes et la question des nationalités', in André Prudhommeaux, *L'effort libertaire* – vol. I: *Le principe d'autonomie*, (Paris, Spartacus, 1978), p21.
16. 'Dans notre courrier: lettre du camarade A.P. de Versailles' (1957-1958), *Noir et Rouge*, 9.
17. André Prudhommeaux, (1953-1954), 'William Godwin ou l'anarchisme pacifique', *Témoins*, 3-4.
18. André Prudhommeaux, 'La révolution hongroise', *Le Contrat Social*, 4 (1957), quoted in Gomez, 'Eléments de biographie'. See also Prudhommeaux, 'Les raisins de la colère', *Témoins*, 14 (1956). This description echoed his April 1938 call for saving the social revolution in Spain 'under the flag of *direct action* and *undisciplined organisation* against the bourgeois government' (emphasis in original) (Prudhommeaux, [1938], 'Le martyr obligatoire', *Terre Libre*).
19. André Prudhommeaux, 'L'énigme cubaine', *Le Monde Libertaire*, 74 (1961). This part of his article actually quoted from a statement made by the Francisco Ferrer FA group in Versailles. Because Prudhommeaux resided in that city, quite probably the words of that group owed much to him directly.
20. André Prunier, 'Libéraux et libertaires', *Témoins*, 1 (1953).
21. Gomez, 'Eléments de biographie'. Founded (secretly by the American CIA) in 1950, this international anti-communist cultural organisation sponsored journals in various languages, including *Preuves* in France. The CIA funding was publicly revealed in 1966.
22. Prunier, 'Libéraux et libertaires'.
23. A.P. (André Prudhommeaux), 'L'équilibre du monde est menacé par la banqueroute politique des USA', *Témoins*, 14(1956).
24. An organisationally more centralised and disciplined revolutionary party model, inspired by the Russian revolution and promoted in France in the late 1920s by many anarchists including Ukrainian exile Nestor Makhno.
25. The tragic 'May Days' of 1937 in Barcelona were a decisive turning point in the fate of the Spanish revolution. At this time, the most prominent CNT-FAI leaders (Juan Garcia Oliver, Federica Montseny and Mariano Vázquez) urged their own anarchist comrades, those thousands who were resisting government forces successfully, to give up their armed struggle in the streets against increasing statist (including communist) control.



26. J. Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, vol. II – *De 1914 à nos jours*, (Paris, François Maspero, 1975), pp33-35.
27. *L'Espagne Nouvelle*, 24 December, 1937, in Berry, D. (trans.) *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917 to 1945*, (Oakland, AK Press, 2009), p257.
28. André Prudhommeaux, 'Rudolf Rocker et la position anarchiste devant la guerre', *Le Réveil Anarchiste* [1946], republished by the *revue Agone*, 35-36 (2006), on-line at <<http://revueagone.revues.org/604>> (1/31/14).
29. Gomez, 'La doute méthodologique'.
30. J. Cello (Prudhommeaux) 'Y a-t-il encore, en France, une droite et une gauche?' *Témoins*, 5 (1954).
31. Gomez, 'La doute méthodologique'.
32. Prudhommeaux (no date), 'Autoportrait', a manuscript published in *A Contretemps*, 42 (February 2012); Prudhommeaux, A. 'Du marxisme à l'anarchie', *Ce Qu'il Faut Dire*, 33 (1946); 'En guise de présentation'.
33. Gomez, 'La doute méthodologique'.
34. Prudhommeaux, 'Du marxisme à l'anarchie'.
35. Prudhommeaux, 'Le pétrole sur le feu'.
36. M. Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*, [1962], (English translation Lincoln, Neb., University of Nebraska Press, 2000), pp184-185.
37. F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [1961], (English translation, New York, Grove Press, 1968), pp94, 191-193.
38. M. Saïl (1894-1953), 'La mentalité kabyle', *Le Libertaire*, 257 (1951); 'Le calvaire des travailleurs nord-africains', *Le Libertaire*, 276 (1951). These and other articles were republished in Mohamed Saïl, *Appels aux travailleurs algériens*, with an informative biographical sketch by compiler Sylvain Boulouque (pamphlet no. 43 in the Volonté Anarchiste series published by the Groupe Fresnes-Antony of the FA, January 1994).
39. Prudhommeaux, 'Du marxisme à l'anarchie'. In this essay, Prudhommeaux criticised the failure of most anarchists to acknowledge this potential subjective evolution.
40. Ironically, the openness of FLN militants to French culture cited here would seem to contradict Prudhommeaux's expectation of cultural regression and insularity (including dependence on Arabic) and at least would suggest a potential healthy non-defensiveness toward other cultures without having to imply abandonment of their own.
41. André Prudhommeaux, (no date), 'Idéologie et mouvement', in Prudhommeaux, *L'effort libertaire*.
42. Prudhommeaux, 'Les anarchistes et la question des nationalités'.
43. F. Mintz, *Histoire de la mouvance anarchiste, 1789-2012*, (Paris, Editions Noir et Rouge, 2012), p187.

44. Despite the ideals of universal freedom and racial and gender equality, anarchist movements in the West themselves have been inconsistent in verbal and activist practice, albeit often unconsciously, as observed in French anarchist journals of the last several decades, D. Porter, *Eyes to the South: French Anarchists and Algeria*, (Oakland, AK Press, 2011) p490.
45. See my detailed discussion of this division in Porter, *Eyes to the South*, pp491-496.